



PRESS RELEASE

Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure

Don Young, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515 • (202) 225-7749 or 225-9446 • Fax (202) 225-6275

Contact: Steve Hansen (Communications Director) (202) 225-7749

Email: Steve.Hansen@mail.house.gov

Justin Harclerode (Deputy Communications Director) (202) 226-8767

Email: Justin.Harclerode@mail.house.gov

To: National Desk/Transportation Reporter

September 25, 2006

Congressional Hearing To Focus On National Academy Of Sciences Report On The Coast Guard's Polar Icebreakers

Washington, D.C. – A Congressional hearing on Tuesday will examine the findings of a National Academy of Sciences study of the present state and future of the U.S. Coast Guard's icebreaker operations in the Arctic and Antarctic.

The hearing by the **U.S. House Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation**, chaired by **U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ)**, is scheduled to begin at **1 p.m. on Tuesday, September 26th in 2167 Rayburn House Office Building.** **(*Note: this hearing was originally scheduled to begin at 2 p.m.)**

A live webcast of the hearing will be available at the Committee's website:

www.house.gov/transportation

Tuesday's Tentative Witness List

- **Dr. Anita K. Jones**, Chair, Polar Research Board, Assessment of USCG polar icebreaker roles and future needs, The National Academies
- **Rear Admiral Joseph L. Nimmich**, Assistant Commandant for Policy & Planning, United States Coast Guard
- **Dr. Arden L. Bement, Jr.**, Director, National Science Foundation
- **Mead Treadwell**, Chairman, U.S. Arctic Research Commission

Background Information

The Coast Guard is the only federal agency that operates polar icebreakers. In one of the most challenging environments on earth, the icebreakers support the U.S. research operations in the Arctic and Antarctic. The United States has territory and citizens above the Arctic Circle, and it maintains three year-round scientific stations in Antarctica to assert a United States presence and ensure that American leadership will be among the nations that are signatories to the Antarctic Treaty.

While the primary mission of the polar icebreakers is to support scientific research missions, the polar icebreakers can also support other Coast Guard missions including search and rescue, marine pollution response, law enforcement, defense operations, and ice operations - i.e., providing icebreaking capability, charting the positions and movements of icebergs (the International Ice Patrol),

and supporting Department of Defense and civilian scientific research. The Coast Guard is the sole federal agency with the essential combination of properly equipped platforms, experienced and trained personnel, and authorities to perform these tasks in the polar regions.

To accomplish these polar missions, the Coast Guard operates three icebreaking vessels: POLAR STAR, POLAR SEA, and HEALY. The POLAR STAR and the POLAR SEA were commissioned in 1976 and 1978, respectively, and are for heavy icebreaking use in both the Arctic and Antarctic. The HEALY was commissioned in 1999 and is only for use in the Arctic since it has light icebreaking capability. The POLAR SEA and POLAR STAR have deteriorated after almost 30 years of operations in some of the harshest conditions in the world, and there are significant issues concerning their possible future service life. Therefore, Congress required a study in the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2005 (Public Law 108-334) to examine the role of the Coast Guard's icebreakers in supporting United States operations in the Arctic and Antarctic, including scenarios to continue those operations. This hearing will examine the findings of the completed study.

**For additional information, access the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee website at:
www.house.gov/transportation**

#